PART : ONE

RELIGION AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Chapter I : The Religious Quest.

Chapter II: The Problem of Evil.
Chapter I

THE RELIGIOUS QUEST

The pursuit of religion in man has arisen to satisfy the definite need of man. From the time immemorial man discovered that the sphere of his senses was not all. But something more still lay beyond. The raw material of religion, this 'consciousness of beyond' within man slowly grew from the unconscious mind to the conscious will, emotion and understanding, and thence to the supra-conscious spirit.

Thus, the faith in religion progressed gradually from crude animism, spiritism and ancestor worship to the faith in the supreme universal reality or God. It is a march from crude primitive outer levels to inner search, from ritualistic action to moral action and from moral action to mystical and metaphysical purpose running through all creation.

It is rightly held thus, that religion is "man's reaction to the totality of things as he apprehends it." It is the response of the whole being to the call of God.

Definition of Religion:

To form an all acceptable definition of the term 'religion' is not an easy task. For, religion is too comprehensive a phenomenon to accept a set definition to be an ultimate one.
The root of religion lies deeper in the particular complex of feelings, thoughts, habits and strivings which make up the warp and woof of the human life. The meaning of religion is not ready-made but it is to be explored continuously. No doubt this meaning may be only a postulate logically, it is not an unsubstantiated imagination. For religion is "to effect in some way or in some measure a vital adjustment however tentative and incomplete to whatever is reacted to or were or could be religious."²

(i) Etymological meaning not enough

Etymologically the term 'religion' is derived from the Latin root 're legere, which means rejoining of the man with his original source. It is in this sense, for instance, christianity asks man to be perfect as our father in heaven is perfect, or as Hinduism speaks of the struggle of the aspiring soul to become divine.

But the common practice to seek etymological meaning is inadequate, leading to too narrow or too wide understanding. Thus, for many, religion is a continuous devotion to the supreme being or God or some high ideas as such or some others may identify religious life with many other attitudes and opinions. Whereas some others take it to be an emotional or aesthetic development.
In this context here, the Hindu word 'Ādhyātmikatā' suggests a better deal, which means that religious search leads oneself to higher and higher goal of the spiritual life. This spiritual life is an unique exercise of the metaphysical quest of self-transcendence given to man. This knowledge of the reality of religion being of higher and supersensible nature is not to be concluded as a subjective construction.

This spiritual activity or faculty, which Rudolf Otto speaks of as 'universal in mankind',\(^3\) is autonomous, dynamic and intelligent phenomenon of human existence. It is an 'a-priori' consciousness which has its own inner structure. That is, in other words it is "the property of an action or its cause, when the action is exercised or the cause subsists, without intrinsic dependence on matter."\(^4\)

(ii) Way of life

Without taking recourse to history of religions or catalogue of definitions, it suffices for our purpose when we broadly say that religion has to do with a way of life and a pattern of behaviour. But not all our patterns of behaviour are religious one. These are those which are "concerned with human relations, with relation to other parts of nature and with an outlook regarding the whole of nature and life."\(^5\)
Like speculative philosophy, the religious objective too, is a search of the nature and the structure of the supreme reality and to indicate the relation of this reality to the world process and man. But unlike speculative philosophy, religion is oriented to man's realization of a deeper truth of his existence, of supreme and infinite value which commands universality and makes for his being. In other words, "metaphysics analyzes the structure of Being in itself, while religion tries to discover the meaning of Being for man." 

Thus, religion is a pursuit of an infinite value. It is a "commitment to a kind of quality that purports to recognize a source beyond itself." But it does not mean a mere consciousness of value as Kant would have us believe, or a mere form of knowledge as Hegel often urged. There is in religious pursuit a mystical element, an apprehension of the real and an enjoyment of it for its own sake.

 Finite Versus Infinite

The belief in the all pervading infinite and supreme God is the basic conviction of religion. The finite man's striving for this is "not after a false infinity", but it best satisfies man's emotional needs and makes for the stability of life. "It invests" to quote Prof. Mukerjee, "man's life with meanings, significances and values in terms
Man must know his duty and destiny and his vital relations to the universe. The roots of this search lie deeper "in the hidden depths of the human spirit." The ceaseless discontent and dissatisfaction by man in his finite nature is the genesis for his search of this reality. The evocative codes of scriptures or invocative statements regarding God make for such attitudes. This felt experience, which is either revealed or intuited, is indeed very extensive, allowing all the conative, cognitive and affective faculties of the human mind to be indistinguishably harmonized.

Human Nature:

(i) Spiritual aspect

Unlike other creatures, the human existence has a significance of its own. Man is a more complex organism representing an unique order of reality. Unlike animals which are the slaves of circumstances and passing moments, man is capable of standing aside from the process of nature and judge it. He can have an objective assessment of himself and the world.

At the macrocosmic level the unity of matter, life, mind, reason and spirit is not given as a fact. But the
same is evidenced at the microcosmic level of man. Human life is a quest for unity. At lower level it may be an adjustment to outer environment, but at higher level the man has an appeal to the demands of spiritual unity.

This rules out the mere mechanical interpretation of human nature. Although man's nature is based on impulses, but this too, in higher and more precise form becomes the search of better and better purposes. Man's inner call not only decries and rejects conventions by other conventions, rules and ideals, but also it means to live beyond their guidance, control or aspiration. An Upanisadic statement substantiates this very much when it says that "true knowledge makes one free."\textsuperscript{11}

The fact that insofar as the psycho-physical instincts are concerned, man's being on a par with other creatures of the universe, is undeniable. So the proper welfare of body is indisputable, and in reality 'it is indistinguishable with his spiritual quest.'\textsuperscript{12} But this physical welfare is only of an instrumental nature, so as to seek and give the meaning and value of the fleeting and discreet experiences of life. Dr. P.T. Raju's contention is noteworthy when he says that "change below man is non-purposive, purposive change which is a result of rational reflection, is peculiar to man."\textsuperscript{13}
(ii) Qualitative aspect

Besides quantitative measurements, it is construed that qualitative analysis is also one of the aspects of human experience. The sage Yagnavalkya was right when he said that "everything is dear for the sake of one's own self." It is this nature which makes for valuation, and its avowed aim is the enhancement and enrichment of human life.

This is why, inspite of man's possessing physical, mental and moral riches, he has a constant sense of inadequacy. Now, if this is not mechanical and does not originate from material life, then it "must be sought for in the depth of human personality."  

But for this, man would have remained human animal cut off from cosmic values and potentialities. Notwithstanding the limitations of physical environment and biological needs of the human history, the superior call of the spiritual nature in man has saved him from mere physicalism and biologism. It is only as a particular human being one is individual, but so far as this call of spirituality in man is concerned one strives for participation in this universal process.

The struggles and conflicts are inevitable phenomena in the process of spiritual elevation. Thus no immanent
factor can exhaust man's self-transcendent nature. It is this "which testifies a 'higher' sphere of reality without which most facts of human life would remain unexplored."¹⁶ This concept of 'transcendence' characterizes all religious experiences, which involves something of the qualitative difference of human nature.

Religion and Value

Value pursing consciousness after all is an empirical one, and it has bio-physical and psycho-social correlates. Valuational discrimination is an essential nature of human intelligence. It is enough to say at this stage that the transcendental search of religion cannot be identified totally and only with this value consciousness.

The point is that the aim of religion is to have knowledge or vision of supreme reality or God. Religion is an experience of the inner life and is to be judged by its own standard. Though this religious experience does not give any final knowledge, it points to the process of dealing with the inadequacies of the above value-pursuing vistas of knowledge. The root of religion lies deeper than feeling, willing and thinking. It is from this deeper nature of its reality, religion probes and evaluates the meaning of the actual status and happenings of life.
Religion and Ethics

The pertinent problem is this that if ethics also means striving for an ideal, then is it not identical with religion? But the fact is that the ethical system is characterised by human limitations, whereas religion is an attempt "to circumvent or minimize the limitations of what underlies the efforts of man." It is an attempt of "transcending oneself from narrower, purely biological and circumstantial, yet even hereditary" limitations.

Ethics takes for granted man's finiteness and expects disciplined behaviour. But religion reveals the deeper side of man. Though man functions with conditioned limitations, his unknown and greater potentialities cannot be ruled out. In reality, ethics derives its value from religion only.

In fact ethics goes beyond itself into religion. That is in other words, ethics must make religion as its basis, else "the ethical standard would be just a tolerant self-interest." Again, Dr. Radhakrishnan truly upholds that "the sense of spiritual and the longing for righteousness go together."

There has been a long history of the close connection between morality and religion. Moral ideals as well as conceptions regarding God have developed gradually from simple
begins. Both are concerned with the good and desirable. Still, religion tends to be superhuman as its source is transcendental reality. To the religious conviction what is highest in spirit is also deepest in nature.

The transcendental realm of spirituality is a drive towards the minimizing the limitations of 'fact' and 'ideal'. As referred to earlier this being a qualitative experience, we cannot have an exact quantitative verification. Man continues to struggle to realize the ethical values, and the realized ethical values become spiritual facts.

Morality represents only an imperfect stage of man's evolution. The moral sanctions of religion are thus needed only upto a certain stage. This is why though all religions have a scheme of moral discipline and values, they are also much more than this. It is not enough merely to do good, but one has to be good also. This is a new dimension altogether beyond the reaches of relative morality. Here there are no strifes of the conditional world and separation from reality or God. It is religion which enables to leave our little self behind and effect the way out of its limitations.

Supreme Reality

God or the supreme reality is referred to as a supreme self-evident power, the original and immutable force behind
all creation. It is the super-human and super-sensuous
supreme being who is the vision of life eternal consisting in
the transcendence of all the limitations imposed by the
temporal world.

This reality has both the immanent and transcendent
aspects. It's experience has arisen from man's unique
numinous sense of sanctity. There is a feeling of awefulness,
overpoweringness, fascination and it evokes emotional
satisfaction in man. One experiences this vital power in
the deepest centre of one's self. It is only in expression
that some speak of it as Father, or as Judge or forgiving
Lord.

Religion tries to seek this great power controlling the
universe with the feeling at the core of its search. Through
subtle discrimination and reflections on issues as birth, life
and death, man is led to the one great source. Whatever name
one may give this reality, it has a timeless existence.

Religion and Faith

The faith in this supreme reality is the substance of
the things hoped for and the projection of fundamental
aspirations. It is a quest of an everlasting life, a faith
that is awakened to itself. It is an attitude of worship
and obedience to supreme being by which all actions are
governed.
It is this commitment which provides the norms of our life and judgement. Delivering one from anxieties and insecurities, the faith enables to strive constantly to realize the ideal.

Religion and Personal Bearing

Religion is distinctly the experience of an influence which has entered into the individual from a realm superior to himself. Religious experience cannot be understood merely from observed data, for it is also a felt experience. Through faith in the supreme reality, man seeks for the integral fulfilment of every moment of his life. For it, to quote Prof. Macdougall, "he (man) not only makes contact with this realm but also shares in it and in turn can contribute something, however little to it."²¹

This quest of religion is as old as man himself. The thirst for the supreme reality is the basic emotional requirement of man, which consists of "all these factors held together by the feeling of sacredness with which they are apprehended."²² True harmony ensues from the knowledge of the supreme reality and accordingly, one is led to purification, transformation and sublimation.

Thus, one has to make constant efforts to be religious. It is much more than mere faith, for religion has its roots
in experience. That is, in the words of Prof. Whitehead, religion is "what the individual does with his own solitari-
ness."\(^{23}\)

Simultaneous with metaphysical reflection thus, religion is also an action in accordance with the result of that reflection. The propositions of the supreme reality are not "literal and logical,"\(^{24}\) else this would lead to just "stoic passionlessness."\(^{25}\)

Still it is not supernatural

Even if one regards religion to be dealing with transcendent supernatural reality, the very fact of the embodiment of man requires it to be natural. It's belief in the higher principle implies only this, that as life transcends matter, and mind transcends life, so the object of religion transcends the category of mind too.

No doubt, one has to struggle hard for this spiritual elevation. One's inwardness has to be pushed to the deepest spiritual limits. To agree with Prof. Raju, "to be an ideal is not necessarily to be unattainable and unreal or unnatural. Only we have to broaden our concept of the natural."\(^{26}\) Religion is supernatural which only means that it is non-empirical and autonomous in character.
In fact there is no chasm or hiatus in the continuous spiritual activity of man. The secular and non-secular are divided only at face value, in substance they are inseparable.

No denial of empiricism

The empirical approach may disprove certain religious belief, but it does not disprove religion itself. Admittedly, that religion is concerned with the quest of an ideal, but it does not mean that it is against the descriptive and factual empirical search. For unless the cosmos be conceived as created and guided by a meaningful power, the objects of the world lose their lasting significance. In its practical aspect, religion is a reflective vision and an ever-increasing understanding of the truths already known.

In fact the empirical world is a source of due endeavour in realizing the supreme reality. The empirical existence is only a means to an end of the dynamic spiritual process, which lives and grows in time, though the whole of it is not found at any one part of time. Dogmas and fables, myths and miracles do not help here, if religion is to be the vital factor of life.

Religion and freedom of self-determination

Determinism in man cannot be rooted out as it is a common feature of all things in the world. But at the same
time the moral dimension in man is invested with responsibility.

Making the conscious choice by man brings out this aspect of freedom in the form of self-determinism. It only means that though all our volitional acts and decisions are conditioned by causal factors, self-determination with personal initiative and action cannot be denied its value. Freedom in its religious aspect is concerned not so much with the mundane achievements as with the continued consciousness of our constant relation with God.

By free will it is not meant that there is a will or decision which is unaffected by causal or determined factors. But that our volitional acts or decisions while being determined by such causal factors are not wholly shaped or determined by them. Thus, all activities may not be freely originated themselves, but they are originated in the basic freedom of the self in making preferences.

**Reason and Intuition**

Reason proceeds by analysis and differentiation, observation and experimentation. It is a critical faculty which handles and controls the objects and its workings. Intuition on the other hand is a simple and direct perception. It is a total view where the mind in its totality surges forward
to know the truth.

Thus, the aim of reason being limited and compromising is unattainable and optimistic. But the infinite reality being incommensurable with finite intelligence, the nature of religious quest is thus "of contemplative character." It is a different level statement, unexplainable by causal explanation of the scientific sense.

By its own virtue, the intuitive search of religion fulfils the human need of perfection. This should not be misconstrued as non-secular, "only it does not look beyond itself for meaning or validity." That is to quote Prof. D.M. Datta, this intuitive quest of religion is "the inner dialectic which makes one constantly strive for fuller and purer views of truth, corrects the sources of self-deception." Religion being a dynamic experience, it is not so much a rational construction as intuitive realization.

Religion and Bliss/Freedom

Religious pursuit aims at man's spiritual freedom. It is an attempt at continuous transformation to higher forms. It is here in the infinite and all pervading pursuit of supreme reality or God, one experiences the sense of rest and fulfilment, eternity and perfection. It is a conversion
A vision of unity and light, giving rise to inner bliss and power, joy and freedom. It is the highest state of insight and self-mastery wherein spatio-temporal limitations are transcended. It is the acme of good. All other goods, including the ethical, are only instrumental to this supreme good.

It is in pursuance of this philosophic background, the religions of the world present the means of salvation for man, the summum bonum of his existence. For these religions the solution to the problem of evil is a most crucial one. It is here they face a serious intellectual problem and a great practical challenge. It is in religions that the problem of evil originates and acquires its most acute form. These religions speak of a plan and teleology, of a moral and spiritual order of the universe. Thus metaphysically man must be aware of the true nature of this supreme reality and orient his life accordingly. In due process of realization, this religious quest will lead to eternal good and happiness on one hand and saves man from psychological frustrations and miseries of the conditional world process on the other.


12. Refer to the famous Sanskrit maxim, Viśvā, sarīra madhyama khalu dharma sādhanām.


29. Philosophical perspective - a selection of essays -
D.M. Datta, Bharti Bhavan, Patna, 1972, pp.74-75.